

# Maurice Hinchey NEWS

## 26<sup>TH</sup> CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT, NEW YORK

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### HINCHEY AND COLLEAGUES ACT TO PROTECT ROADLESS AREAS

WASHINGTON - U.S. Representative Maurice Hinchey (NY-26) today joined colleagues in a press conference to announce the introduction of the National Forest Roadless Area Conservation Act. The legislation would protect nearly sixty million acres of pristine National Forest lands from logging, mining, and drilling, except in cases where the logging is necessary to protect forest health, to improve habitat for endangered species or to reduce fire danger. The lands will remain open for recreational use including hunting, fishing, camping and hiking.

Hinchey made the following remarks:

"As a strong supporter of wild forests I'm here to support the introduction of this important bipartisan legislation to protect our last remaining unroaded forests.

"The National Forest System was created nearly a century ago by President Teddy Roosevelt for 'the greatest good of the greatest number in the long run.' Today, publicly owned forests continue to provide "the greatest good" for millions of Americans, offering clean water and unmatched opportunities for camping, fishing, hiking, and other recreational pursuits.

"Unfortunately, the Forest Service has failed to protect our forests in the public interest. Under their stewardship over 400,000 miles of logging roads have been built, while industrial activities have encroached on more than half of all National Forest lands. Only 18 percent of the 192-million acre National Forest system is currently afforded protection against destructive activities. The nation's leading scientists have repeatedly informed us that the unroaded portions of our national forests are not only the most important habitat for fish and wildlife, but are critical sources of clean drinking water for over 60 million Americans.

"Our constituents are demanding the protection of our remaining unroaded forests in order to preserve recreational opportunities and the critical environmental functions these intact forests provide. In response to public demand, the Clinton Administration developed a policy to protect our last remaining 60 million acres of roadless national forest land. This policy was three years in the making and was the most commented upon federal rulemaking in our nation's history. Many members of Congress, including myself, were involved in the creation of this policy.

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"The roadless policy was one of the most significant national forest conservation measures of the last 100 years and should have been preserved as an enduring legacy of true forest protection. Unfortunately, the Bush Administration is eviscerating this landmark conservation achievement for the benefit of the timber, oil and mining industries. Given the scientific basis for the policy and its popularity with the public, it's shameful that the Bush Administration is undermining this achievement and putting special interests ahead of the public interest.

"Nowhere is the need for the protection of roadless forests more apparent than in the Tongass National Forest in Alaska. The Tongass is our largest national forest and without protection it is where 50% of all roadless area logging and road building is expected to occur in the next four years. A few weeks ago the Forest Service announced it was lifting the Clinton Administration's ban on road building and logging in 2.5 million acres of the Tongass, and they're moving ahead with plans to log in 33 pristine roadless areas that deserve protection. We simply cannot afford to keep losing our most pristine forests such as the Tongass and their ecological functions.

"Now that the Bush Administration has signaled its intention to exploit these wild places for short-term gain it is imperative for Congress to move forward in a bipartisan manner and enact this legislation codifying the Roadless Area Conservation Rule. We owe this important forest legacy to our current and future generations."